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Dame Judi Dench could be your next AI voice assistant
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Dame Judi Dench could be your next AI voice assistant

Matt Levin | Sep 25, 2024

Heard on:



Judi Dench is among the celebrities who have signed multimillion-dollar contracts with Meta to create AI assistants based on their voices. Tim P. Whitby/Getty Images for BFI



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Meta, the social media behemoth formerly known as Facebook, thinks it knows how to get you to talk to its artificial intelligence voice assistant: make it sound like Dame Judi Dench.

The Academy Award-winning British actress is one of several celebrities to which Meta has reportedly paid millions of dollars to humanize a new generation of chatbots. Other voices include the comedians Awkwafina and Keegan-Michael Key and wrestler-turned-actor John Cena. But working in the AI arena presents complications for entertainers.

Right now, the relationship between humans and the voice assistant on their phones or nightstands basically takes the form of call and response: Tell me the weather, order me pizza, etc.

Meta wants chats with its AI assistant to be more like actual conversations. And who wouldn't want to talk with Awkwafina?

"Meta enlisted the voices of celebrities to say, you know, hey, if you use these recognizable celebrity voices, does that encourage a different kind of interaction?" said Samantha Wolfe, a tech marketing professor at New York University.

Hosted by Kai Ryssdal

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The phenomenon of famous people voicing tech is nothing new. Think [Arnold Schwarzenegger giving you driving directions on Waze](#). But AI could take that business in lucrative new directions.

"I think this is the future. I think this is the next phase of celebrity endorsement-slash-brand partnership," said Matthew Belloni, who covers Hollywood for the media company Puck.

That future, though, might be more fraught than traditional endorsements or voiceover work. It's one thing if Judi Dench is a little late telling you to take a right turn. It's another if her AI voice

spews misinformation or hate speech.

"I imagine there is an out if something goes haywire, if these chatbots start saying things or doing things that is not on brand," Belloni said.

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Also, these AI voice deals come at a time when many in Hollywood consider the technology not only an existential threat, but also unethical.

"All you have is your body and your voice and your choices," said filmmaker and former actress Justine Bateman, who is also the founder of [Credo 23](#), an organization that certifies AI was not used in producing films and series.

"And to just give that away such that it can say anything to anybody — it's just repulsive to me. I would never do that. What else do you have?"

Meta did not respond to a request for comment.

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